

## The Declaration of Independence: Argument Writing and Close Reading Task

**Text grade band placement:**

11-12

Text	Text Complexity Analysis
<p><b>Title:</b> The Declaration of Independence</p> <p><b>Author:</b> Thomas Jefferson</p> <p><b>Citation/Publication info:</b> Jefferson, Thomas. <i>The Declaration of Independence</i>. U.S. 1776.</p> <p><b>Link:</b>  <a href="http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html">http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html</a></p>	<p><b>Quantitative:</b> Lexile: 1840L</p>
	<p><b>Qualitative:</b>  <b>Conventionality:</b> Dense and complex; contains abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language  <b>Vocabulary:</b> Generally unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or overly academic language; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading  <b>Sentence Structure:</b> Mainly complex sentences often containing multiple concepts  <b>Subject Matter Knowledge:</b> Requires extensive, perhaps specialized prior content knowledge</p>
	<p><b>Reader and Task:</b>            To use this text with struggling readers would require close focus on passages containing key concepts; these passages would need to be explored sentence by sentence and, in some cases, word by word.</p>

### ELA Common Core Standards addressed by task

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.8 Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional

principles and use of legal reasoning (e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents) and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy (e.g., *The Federalist*, presidential addresses).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.9 Analyze seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (including The Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address) for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### What key insights should students take from this text?

- Persuasive rhetoric is the art of using language to argue and convince others to adopt a position or act in a certain way.
- There are specific elements of persuasive rhetoric which can be analyzed and employed.
- There is a basic structure to arguments.
- The authors of the American Revolution used highly developed reasoning skills and persuasive rhetoric to meet their goals.
- Thomas Jefferson made stylistic and persuasive choices that can be analyzed and evaluated.

### Text-Dependent Questions

- **Relationship Among Ideas:** Identify and explain any opposing claims Jefferson anticipates. What counterarguments does he offer? How do these relate to his overall argument?
- **Author's Methods:** What is life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?
- **Author's Methods:** What claim does Jefferson make in the first paragraph of the Declaration, and what support does he say he will provide? Does he then provide adequate support?
- **Author's Methods:** What claims does Jefferson make about governments? How do these claims impact his argument?
- **Author's Methods:** What is the effect of Jefferson's use of the word "duty" in the second paragraph?
- **Author's Methods:** What is the persuasive effect of his language in the closing paragraphs?
- **Drawing an Inference:** Can we infer anything about Jefferson's intended audience based on his diction?
- **Structure:** Looking back over the entire text, what is distinctive about the structure of Jefferson's argument? How does the structure contribute to the impact of the argument?

Writing Mode	Writing Prompt
Argumentative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Provide a critical analysis of the Declaration's treatment of the origin of rights and the role of government. Does this document provide sufficient protection of individual liberty? Defend your point of view. Cite textual evidence appropriately throughout your analysis.</li><li>2. Write a personal declaration in Jefferson's style. Apply some of the tools of persuasive rhetoric examined and discussed during a study of the text.</li></ol>